2: Wilson E-5 (1934-1938)1957 FN17 Ngonde FN17
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or his crops fail, or his cattle die, he reflects on any quarrels he may have had with kinsmen or affines or neighbours, and on any rituals he should have performed and has omitted wholly or in part. He may be quite clear in his own mind that the misfortune is due to some particular wrong-doing (*isangwa*)—perhaps a quarrel with a brother, or neglect to kill for his new neighbours on his inheritance from his father—and proceed directly to patch up the quarrel and perform the neglected ritual. More often he thinks of several possible causes and lays them before the oracle, relying upon it to select between them. How several possible causes of misfortune occurred to the chief sufferers, their kinsmen and neighbours, is shown in the cases of Enesi, Katanya, Mwambuputa and Mpoma quoted at the end of the book (pp. 258 ff.).

No linguistic distinction is made between an offence punished by the courts and one thought to be punished by the shades; both are wrong-doings (*isangwa*), and there is no sharp distinction between an offence against a living kinsman and an offence against a dead one. In short, there is no clear conception of 'sin' as opposed to 'tort' or 'crime'.

There are two themes constantly recurring in Nyakyusa theology: firstly, men must observe the traditional rituals (both positive and negative) or they will go mad; and secondly, the anger of senior relatives and neighbours will injure unless it is confessed and goodwill expressed.

The first conception is a magical one:[1] what is required is the performance or avoidance of particular acts in a particular form on particular occasions; the second is sacramental, it is 'anger in the heart' that is dangerous, and no ritual is held to be efficacious without a change of heart.

Often the two conceptions are not consciously related to one another: again and again one is told: 'The rituals must be performed or men will go mad,' and there is no reference to the state of mind of the performers; but on certain occasions they overlap explicitly, as when Kasitile adjured his kinsmen to confess all while they were performing the ritual to 'cut the ropes'; and always there is a symbolic connection, for the rituals themselves express the value of amity between kinsmen, of respect for seniors and obligation towards juniors.

The neglect of the marriage ritual is itself an expression of disrespect for parents or parents-in-law, and a breach of the sex code,

[1] In the sense defined by G. P. M. Wilson, *The Analysis of Social Change*, pp. 69-70.

3: Mackenzie M-5 (ca. 1925) 1925
FN17 Ngonde FN17

CHAPTER XIV

The Supreme Being

776 OF the Supreme Being there is little that can be said with certainty beyond that He was believed in prior to the coming of the white man and the teachings of Christianity. The existence of this belief cannot be doubted. Indications of it are found everywhere in the native mind inextricably intertwined with life and thought and language, with prayer and sacrifice, with birth and death, with famine and pestilence and sword. For the rest, there is much confusion. That a developed [779] theology does not exist, hardly needs to be said. What one informant will give as common belief, another will say he never heard of; it belongs, he will tell you, to another district, but it was not the belief of his fathers.

776 538 Many parables and proverbs, of the pre-European origin of which there can be no doubt, give evidence of the belief in a Supreme Being. "Who mocks at orphans," says an old proverb, "let him beware: God is watching him." "God will judge between us and the white man," a common saying at funerals, is necessarily of recent origin; but there are scores of other sayings which are certainly ancient. Many

9:Wilson E-5 (1934-1955) 1959
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The African National Church

Belief

1. We believe religion is an essential component of man's growth and that man should live according to his religion and not merely be a nominal member of a Church whose rules he cannot carry out. Like all other countries Africa is in need of a Church which would correspond with her God-given customs and manners.

2. We believe the commission of the Christian Church to Africa was to impart Christ and education in such a way as to fit in with manners and customs of the people and not that it should impose on the African the unnecessary and impracticable methods of European countries, such as having one wife, etc., which have no biblical authority.

3. We believe the immoralities now prevailing among us are the direct result of the unnatural position into which the African has been driven, coupled by the false and misleading theory that outside one's own Church beliefs others can do no good.

4. We believe in the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man regardless of colour and creed, and that the African religion with its traditions, laws, and customs was instituted by Him so that the Africans may realise Him by their own observance.

Constitution

1. The name of this Church shall be called the *African National Church*.

2. This Church shall not be antagonistic towards other organized Churches but shall acknowledge and recognise them in their own spheres whether Christian, Jewish, Mohammedan, or Buddhist; and all African religions serving God through their ancestral spirits because all are trying to uplift man towards the love of God, our opinion being that all were given by Him for the guidance of man.

3. As the African National Church is a new movement having no previous form in Nyasaland, and the first to affect the educated Natives who are outside the other organized Churches by suspension or otherwise, its ministers and other office-bearers shall be elected and ordained by the vote of the whole congregation.

4. The governance of this Church shall be according to European methods, that is to say, it shall have buildings for worship, hold conference and councils, and keep proper records of its proceedings, funds, etc.

5. Members of the Church shall be people of good character according to the Native traditions, laws, and customs, as contained in the *First Five Books of the Christian Bible*, whether polygamists or not.

6. The Rules of faith shall be based on the said *Five Books of the Christian Bible*, and members shall be suspended only when they break such, our guidance for discipline being the *Ten Commandments*.

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Aim

The aim of this Church is the uplifting of the African *en masse* taking in its rise the old people who are at present being left out by religions of the North and its civilization, as well as winning those who are considered bad because of polygamy and drink, and are refused any better qualities for doing good any more, to try and restore an atmosphere of a deeply, naturally religious life as prevailed in the days of long ago which was manifest in words as well as deeds.

Regarding the organization of the Church, it was stated:

Every district requiring a Pastor shall submit its application to the annual General Conference for its approval.

Any novice Pastor elected and ordained by the minister shall not be entitled at his early appointment or nomination to administer the ministerial duties, but shall sit with his Presiding Pastor for at least six months for his qualification as a minister.

If any Church, elders, preachers, deacons or group of Churches shall be found ordaining a Pastor or Pastors without the approval of the Annual General Conference, leaders of such offending Churches shall be brought before the Annual General Conference for trial and if found guilty be suspended or expelled from the organization.

The office bearers of our organization shall be as follows:

[791]

(a) The Secretary who is the sole head of the organization.
(b) The Presiding Pastors.
(c) Pastors.
(d) Preachers.
(e) Elders.
(f) Deacons and Deaconesses.

The Society shall be divided into districts over which one Presiding Pastor shall be stationed to supervise a Pastor or Pastors under him in that area.

It shall be the duty of every Pastor to feed his flock and to sit as Chairman of his Kirk Session, to enforce the discipline of the Church and to forward his monthly report to his Presiding Pastor.

It shall be the duty or duties of the Presiding Pastor to visit his Pastor or Pastors showing or teaching them good governance of the Church and to send to the Secretary his quarterly reports of his district activities.

If any of the Presiding Pastors or Pastors shall fail to comply with the rules of this constitution they shall upon conviction thereof by the Annual General Conference, be suspended or expelled from the Church.

It shall be the duties of the Elders to look after their Church members

9: Wilson E-5 (1934-1955) 1959
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during worshipping hours, but shall remove mine until evening when worshipping is over.

Any member found contravening these rules shall be dealt with by the Session and if found guilty shall be suspended or expelled from the Church.

The term of Chairman for the Annual Conference shall be two years, but he shall be elected again if required.

The Annual General Conference shall be composed of a body of men chosen from each division, viz. Pastors, Elders, Deacons, and other suitable men.

A general confession with words and music composed by one of the Pastors of the African National Church, Robert Samlee, is used as an alternative to the Ten Commandments. Nyamaru translates it for us from the original Tumbuka.

Jehovah God we have come before Thee to worship and to confess our sins which we have done during the week.

Response: May they all go away (*from Bridge*).[1]

We have sinned before Thee in speaking to people, we have offended Thy creatures, we have spoken bad words, we have grieved their hearts, Father.

May they all go away.

We have sinned against Thee in thoughts covering the wives and husbands of others; we have broken the Ten Commandments, Father. We have done wrong in our village, Father. Witchcraft, adultery, and hatred, all these are in our village. We pray forgive all, Father.

May they all go away.

Our chiefs do not love one another in their hearts. Take such hearts from them and give them one heart.

May they all go away.

A new commandment you have given unto us all to love one another as in Heaven, where there is no quarrelling. Teach us all to keep Thy Word, Father.

May they all go away.

That our chiefs may be one in loving and ruling their country and their people, and lead us all well. This we pray, father, grant us.

May they all go away.

The old worship is broken down; we have come as wild animals which are without God. Call us again to worship, Father.

May they all go away.

Africa is the land of our forefathers. We have damaged her with our new ways, by leaving all the ways of our forefathers, ways which gave peace to the country, Father.

[1] The phrase used in the papers about the cleansing the country, cf. p. 119.

9cWilson E-S (1934-1955) 1959
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May they all go away.

Our Church is calling everyone to come in so that the house of marriage may be filled. It is Thy work to give them[1] all new dresses.

May they all go away.

We are taking beer as wild animals; we forget worship which is our life. Teach us to drink beer moderately, Father.

May they all go away.

We have forgotten all the laws You gave to our forefathers. We have married women by snatching. Turn us to a life of new marriages according to the ways of our forefathers, Father.

May they all go away.

Father, Son and Holy Ghost, One God, ever and ever. Do unto us according to what we have said. Amen, amen, amen.

In spite of the assertion in the constitution that the rules of faith are based on the first five books of the Bible, a sermon we heard was based on New Testament parables; candidates at baptism must give their assent to Apostles' creed; and the doctrine of the resurrection is preached at funerals, John xi. 25-6, and Job xix. 25-7, being read.

The African National Church has five schools at which half the fees charged in corresponding classes in mission schools are levied, but not all of them succeed in keeping their pupils. In 1937 there was a 'strike' by African National Church parents against sending their children to one school because 'the children of the leaders in this area are attending the Livingstonia schools and none goes to their own National Schools'.

The members of Ngemela's Church were less sophisticated than those of the African National Church and we heard of no written constitution. The services were also simpler. The only sermon we heard was on repentance.

Repent and repent anew; do not delay! Repent in your hearts! There is no virtue in baptism; it is just water; but let your hearts be washed clean. The world is full of things which excite wonder and envy. Many when they see the riches of their fellow say to themselves: 'I will go and steal his things', but we must not do that. Many go and commit adultery in the long grass, but we must not do that. God has sent us the Gospel. These are the words of Christ and none other are his words (holding up the New Testament). Our Fathers had never heard of it, but we have, and Christ calls us to repent. In the old days when a

[1] Referring, Nyamwezi said, to the virtue of polygamists. Many women in Ngonde objected to polygamy on the ground that others there were several wives they were not properly clothed.

9: Wilson E-5 (1934-1955) 1959
FN17 Ngonde FN17
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stranger came through the country our fathers lay in wait for him and killed him, but we are learning and have to learn to give him food and a night's shelter. Repent and let your hearts be washed!

We differ from other Christians because we baptize in Jordan, and they baptize in a dish in the church. They say we are wrong, but we say we do what Christ told us to do. They also say we are wrong to marry more than one wife. The words we say are just the same as the creed of those at Kalembe (i.e. Lutherans) with two differences, that of baptism and that of having more than one wife.

Communion services are celebrated half-yearly at each of several different centres by the leaders of the 'independent' Churches, and since they are unable to obtain wine, sweet tea or a light beer are used instead.

The members of Ngemela's Church contribute to buy a bull and rice and beer, and share a feast together after a communion service, and it is alleged by outsiders, though stoutly denied by members, that these are 'love feasts' at which members exchange wives,[1] to show that they are 'one body'. The African National Church also holds feasts after services and some outsiders say these too are 'love feasts', but outside opinion on the African National Church's feasts was much less unanimous than about Ngemela's feasts. It is certain that in Ngemela's church men and women drink sitting together in a manner not conventional among the Nyakyusa. Members of the mission Churches spoke of members of the independent Churches as living 'just like pagans' and averred that, despite their polygyny, their members ran off with other men's wives and were scarcely disciplined for doing so.

It is also clear that the would-be members are baptized almost immediately, with no period of testing and instruction such as is insisted upon by the mission Churches; that very many of them are members who have been suspended by other Churches; and that the 'pastors' have no special training for their task.

Nyamuru's church attracted more educated people than did Ngemela's and, in terms of Dr. Sundkler's classification,[2] his was a typical Ethiopian Church with its emphasis on African nationalism. Ngemela, the son of a minor chief, behaved much like a chief and attracted the less educated. He emphasized 'washing' —baptism by immersion—and repentance, and he was peripatetic

[1] This is also alleged of the Watch Tower in Northern Rhodesia. cf. Ian Cunnison, 'A Watch Tower Assembly in Central Africa', *International Review of Missions*, xl (1951), p. 463.

[2] B. G. M. Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets*, Lutterworth Press (1948), pp. 259

9: Wilson E-5 (1934-1955) 1959
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like most of the leaders of Zionist Churches in the south.[1] It is noticeable that the two 'independent' Churches have a more elaborate form of service than the Church from which their leaders have sprung, and Ngemela habitually wears conspicuous vestments. There is, of course, great variation between different denominations in the emphasis placed on ritual, some Protestants abjuring it and turning their very insistence on starkness and simplicity into a ritual in itself—a taboo. There seems to be a clear tendency in Southern Africa for 'independent' Churches to express themselves more and more in ritual and less in dogma. In this way they reduce the gap between themselves and the pagans, for the pagan religion is expressed almostly exclusively in ritual, whereas Christianity is expressed in creeds and confessions as well as in the rituals of the Church.

(c) THE CONTRAST BETWEEN PAGAN AND CHRISTIAN

There are certain common elements in the rituals celebrated by pagans and Christians: some of the occasions are the same, and in the conceptions of sacrifice, of death and rebirth, of confession and cleansing, there are similarities; but there are also profound differences. The conception of life, immortality, replaces the preoccupation with fertility, for though most Nyakyusa Christians, like the pagans, regard celibacy as evidence of physical abnormality, and the conventional desire of a woman is to have six children—a quiverful in Nyakyusa eyes—yet fertility is no longer the end of all being, sought in every ritual. There are profound differences, too, in the values expressed in the rituals regarding sex relations, the range of moral obligations, and social change. In pagan thought polygyny is good—a man should have many children. Child marriage is defended on the ground that a girl 'gets accustomed to her husband' if she goes to him early, and homosexual relations between youths and young men are tolerated since they have no wives and cannot marry if the older men are polygynists. What is upheld is the chastity of women, and a total separation of the sex activities of members of successive generations, expressed in the taboos limiting familiarity between mother and son, father and nubile daughter, father-in-law and daughter-law. In Christian thought it is the 'pure in heart' who 'see God' and this is interpreted by the mission Churches to imply monogamy. Only in the 'independent' African Churches is it assumed

[1] The emphasis on healing, so common in the south, is absent.